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Can Rick Perry Pivot? (The Note)

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This week Rick Perry is trying to pull a Barack Obama. In other words, pivot from a variety of distractions to the number one issue on voters' minds: the ailing economy.

He's hired a new team of advisers and he's touting a new economic message. But can Perry create a new image?

Before he can rebound, the first thing Perry needs to do is work on sticking to his own script. If today's message is supposed to be all about taxes — Perry is unveiling his flat tax proposal in South Carolina in a few hours — why continue to talk birtherism?

"Look I haven't seen his, I haven't seen his grades. My grades ended up on the front page of the newspaper, so let's you know, if we're going to show stuff, let's show stuff, but look that's all a distraction, I mean I get it. I'm really not worried about the president's birth certificate. It's fun to poke at him a little bit and say 'Hey, how about let's see your grades and your birth certificate,'" Perry said in an interview with CNBC's John Harwood Monday previewing the economic news the Texas governor will make later today.

(As ABC News' Arlette Saenz notes, over the weekend, Perry opened speculation over the birther topic when he did not give a direct answer about where he stands on the issue.)

Meanwhile, Perry's new tax plan, while to the right of Romney's, doesn't do much to set him apart from the field. It's designed not so much as a game changer than as something to get him in the game.

It's officially called the "Cut, Balance and Grow" plan and it proposes an optional 20 percent flat tax rate, drops the corporate tax rate to 20 percent and will temporarily lower the rate to 5.25 percent to promote companies working overseas to move to the U.S., among other things.

One important detail that Perry leaves out: His flat tax is optional. ABC's Jonathan Karl notes that under Perry's plan, if you want to stay in the current system, you can. "The opt-out provision allows Perry to claim that nobody will be hurt by his plan — because they can just stay doing what they are now doing — but it also makes it significantly less bold," Karl writes. "The old system will still exist. The IRS will still be in business."

One GOP strategist told The Note that Perry's plan is "clearly a dog whistle to the right and first sign that Perry is shifting an insurgent campaign geared at rallying against the GOP establishment, similar to the 'Cut, Cap, Balance' coalition."

But all of this comes as a new national poll conducted by The New York Times and CBS News finds Perry continuing to sink. Perry lands at just six percent in the survey, which was taken in the days after last week's debate in Las Vegas. The lead in the Republican primary goes to Herman Cain, who bested Mitt Romney with 25 percent support compared to Romney's 21 percent — a difference that is within the poll's margin of error. Perry is behind both former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and fellow Texan, Congressman Ron Paul.

But as The Times points out, "a large majority of Republican primary voters have yet to make up their minds about the candidate they would like to see as their party's nominee for president in 2012. About eight in 10 Republican primary voters say it is still too early to tell whom they will support, and just four in 10 say they have been paying a lot of attention to the 2012 presidential campaign."

<http://nyti.ms/uOcxXT>

PERRY CALLS ROMNEY A 'FAT CAT' Rick Perry has braced himself for potential criticism of his economic plan's flat-tax component, sending a message directly to Mitt Romney, who rebuked the flat tax in 1996, ABC's Arlette Saenz notes. Asked in an interview Monday with John Harwood of CNBC how he would respond to possible criticism from Romney of a 20-percent flat tax, which he plans to introduce today, Perry said, "I'd say he ought to go look in the mirror, I guess. I consider him to be a fat cat." During Steve Forbes' 1996 presidential run, Romney chided the flat tax as one developed for "fat cats." Forbes helped Perry develop the economic plan that he will unveil in South Carolina this morning. Perry defended his plan, which creates an optional 20 percent tax and eliminates dividends, capital gains and interest income taxes in the country, saying it should be lauded as a "tax cut across the board," not one that benefits the wealthiest in this country. <http://abcn.ws/rx9bNk>

PERRY'S NEW GUARD. Texas Governor Rick Perry brought in some reinforcements Monday for his struggling campaign, adding a slew of senior advisors and media strategists to his team. Joe Allbaugh, who ran George W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign and served as director of FEMA, joins the team as a senior advisor, along with Fred Maas, who has worked with John McCain and Bob Dole. Nelson Warfield, Jim Innocenzi and Curt Anderson, who have worked on political ads in previous campaigns, are joining the campaign to help on the media side. Warfield most recently worked on Fred Thompson's 2008 campaign and Bob Dole's 1996 run. Anderson worked for Mitt Romney in 2008, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney in 2000, and Steve Forbes in 1996. Anderson also co-wrote a book with Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, who endorsed Perry last month. Tony Fabrizio, a well-known Republican pollster who worked on Dole's 1996 campaign joins the team as well. Anderson,

Fabrizio and Warfield are veterans of Florida Gov. Rick Scott's campaign. Stanton Anderson will serve as a congressional liaison for the Perry camp. "Perry knows that to be successful he needs to bring more people in," Republican strategist Keith Appell told ABC News. "He has a very good campaign team nucleus but he now needs to become the comeback kid, of sorts. To do that, it helps to bring in battle tested people. "

ON TODAY'S "TOP LINE." ABC's Rick Klein and Amy Walter interview Democrat Jose Hernandez, a former astronaut and candidate for Congress, Also on a program, Jonathan Karl's "Subway Series" interview with Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus (preview below). **Watch "Top Line" LIVE at 12:00 p.m. Eastern.** <http://abcn.wstoptineliveabc>

RNC CHAIRMAN: FLORIDA MUST PAY. ABC News' Jonathan Karl and Gregory Simmons report: The 2012 political calendar may now be set, but Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus says Florida will not be forgiven for messing with the Republican primary schedule. "There is no discretion. There is no coming back. There is no kumbaya that's going to happen. They're going to lose half of their delegates and that's a pretty serious penalty," Priebus said during an interview with ABC News' "Subway Series with Jonathan Karl." Florida officials' decision to move the state's primary date to January 31st set off a domino effect among other early states. After months of uncertainty and consternation over primary calendar front-loading, a tightly packed Republican nomination process finally solidified over the weekend when Nevada's Republican Party voted to move its caucus date from Jan. 14 to Feb. 4 — a move Priebus lobbied hard for. Priebus says the way the calendar has shaped up is a win. "You should be saying thanks. You're welcome," Priebus told ABC News. "This should be totally positive. Forty-nine out of fifty states, including six territories, followed line by line the RNC rules." <http://abcn.wstoptineliveabc>

DEBATING OBAMA'S JOBS PLAN. Intelligence Squared is holding a debate on whether "Congress Should Pass Obama's Jobs Plan Piece By Piece," moderated by ABC's John Donvan tonight. It takes place at NYU's Skirball Center and debating for the motion are Cecilia Rouse, former economics adviser to President Obama, and Mark Zandi, Chief Economist of Moody's Analytics. Against the motion are Daniel Mitchell, Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, and Richard Epstein, The Laurence A. Tisch Professor of Law. See the press release below for more info. Details: Reception 5:45 – 6:30 PM / Debate 6:45 – 8:30. NYU's Skirball Center / 566 Laguardia Place, New York <http://bit.ly/nXXODq>

THE BUZZ

HERMAN CAIN'S STRANGE CAMPAIGN VIDEO. Presidential candidate Herman Cain touts his 9-9-9 plan on the campaign trail, but his top adviser appears to be subtly suggesting a different slogan: "Smoke 'em if you got 'em." The Cain campaign released a quirky web video Monday night featuring Cain's chief of staff and campaign manager, Mark Block. Block says in the ad, "We need you to get involved, because together we can do this. We can take this country back." At the end of the spot, Block is shown taking a long drag from a cigarette and blowing smoke into the camera lens as Tea Party singer Krista Branch's song "I Am America" provides the soundtrack. Block is no ordinary campaign chief. According to a recent Daily Caller profile, Block was "banned from politics in Wisconsin for three years and forced to pay a \$15,000 fine after being accused by the Wisconsin State Elections Board of violating election law in 1997 as campaign manager to state Supreme Court Justice." <http://abcn.wstoptineliveabc>

NOTED: CAIN TO HONE FOREIGN POLICY CREDENTIALS. The Daily Caller's Alex Pappas and Jamie Weinstein report: "Almost every day, Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain is handed a one-page briefing from his chief foreign policy adviser on news from around the world. It's one of several things his campaign says the former Godfather's Pizza CEO, who has never held elective office before, is now doing to bone up on foreign policy — especially as he faces a big test in November at a GOP debate on national security issues. "He's really getting up to speed a lot more so than people give him credit for," J.D. Gordon, Cain's foreign policy and national security adviser who prepares the briefings, said in an interview with The Daily Caller on Monday. Throughout his campaign for the White House, Cain has been intentionally vague on how he would handle certain foreign policy challenges as president. That makes some conservatives uneasy. "I have no idea what Mr. Cain's views are other than being generally pro-Israel," said Elliott Abrams, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, who served as a deputy national security adviser for President George W. Bush." <http://thedc.com/sGSVen>

HOUSE, SENATE MOVING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTION ON JOBS. "As the Senate enjoys a week-long recess, the House of Representatives returns to legislative business and will vote on two bills this week that Republicans say provide a better environment for job creation, including one to free up domestic copper resources," reports ABC's John R. Parkinson. "It's been a phrase echoed by Congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle all year long: "Where are the jobs?" Which party is doing more to create jobs? With the unemployment rate hovering around 9 percent all year, it's increasingly difficult to definitively credit anyone in the divided Congress with doing much positive for job creation. Few bills have passed through both chambers of Congress and reached the president's desk for his signature. Last Friday, President Obama signed the three free trade agreements recently approved by Congress for Colombia, Panama and South Korea. Democrats and Republicans alike have praised the pacts for creating tens of thousands of jobs. "We have said over and over again that we should not let our differences get in the way of delivering results," Cantor, R-Va., said in a statement Friday after the president signed the FTAs into law. Score one for bipartisanship, right? Maybe not." <http://abcn.ws/rDLEvV>

HUNTSMAN TRIES FOR THE COLBERT BUMP. With poor poll percentages and even worse fundraising numbers, there's no denying that these days Jon Huntsman could use a little public relations pick-me-up, ABC's Sarah Kunin reports. On Monday, the former governor swapped out the New Hampshire house party circuit for Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report" in an effort to obtain the popularity propellant that is "The Colbert bump." "I like you," host Stephen Colbert said to Huntsman. "I like the cut of your jib. I don't know what a jib is but I like the way you cut it." "In recent polls you are at two percent. Are you ready for the Colbert bump?" Colbert asked. "I am so ready for the Colbert bump," Huntsman answered. Colbert continued, "Governor you may be at two percent. We're going to get you up to whole milk." Huntsman's appearance on the show allowed him to reach out to Colbert's key 18-49 demographic, discussing his experience in politics and the private sector to an entirely new audience. However, it was a joke Huntsman made about China, the country where he served as ambassador for two years, that caused the crowd to groan. <http://abcn.ws/uxwFws>

WHO'S TWEETING?

@RealClearScott: Leading Steve Forbes scholar>> MT [@TimAlbrechtIA](#) Big change from the Forbes flat tax plan: Perry would keep interest & charitable deductions

@ByronYork: Rove hits back: 'Herman Cain is the one giving the Democrats material for attack ads.'ow.ly/786J6

@shearm: @mittromney different than during maiden campaign. Still bad jokes. But looser My story with @ashleyparker #onthetrailnytimes.com/2011/10/25/us/...

@ThePlumLinGS: Labor headed for win in Ohio; Obama should ignore pundits advising him to drop new populism. In Roundup: wapo.st/sKZ361

@FakeMarkBlock: The day Obama said he quit smoking is the day I told Herman he had to run for president.

POLITICAL RADAR: Check out The Note's Futures Calendar: <http://abcn.ws/Z19gV>

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